

# Women must confront Ottawa's anti-equality agenda [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

International Women's Day will be observed in more than 40 countries on March 8th. Lately, women in Canada have had little to celebrate. The economic crisis is in full swing and women workers are bracing for the worst economic turmoil in decades, without the support they need to weather the storm. In the past several years we have witnessed a series of attacks on women by a federal government that has placed equality at the bottom of its list of priorities.

The recent budget didn't just leave women out – it was carefully crafted to deliberately attack and undermine our equality. If this is any reflection of what we have to look forward to, women are in big trouble. The government has tabled legislation that will radically change the rules governing pay equity in the federal public sector.

The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act – included as part of the omnibus Budget Implementation Act – will remove the right of public sector workers to file complaints for pay equity with the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

The legislation will also impose a \$50,000 fine on any union that encourages or assists their own members in filing a pay equity complaint, leaving women to fight the system on their own. Since no individual can afford such legal or political action, this will clearly be a mockery of justice.

This situation is completely unacceptable. Forcing workers to bargain for their human rights is not an appropriate way to ensure women's right to equal pay for work of equal value.

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Women in the workforce need child care, yet our demand for a national, affordable and accessible child care has fallen on deaf ears. In the coming months, child care programs across the country will be closing as federal money runs out. A 2004 OECD study ranked Canada last among developed nations for access to early learning and childcare, and we are poised to fall even further behind.

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There is much to do as International Women's Day approaches and after it passes. The Canadian Labour Congress, the national voice of the labour movement, represents 3.2 million Canadian workers. We are in the midst of an Economic Equality campaign and we will soon launch a new workshop called Skills for Change. Women have waited long enough. International Women's Day provides an opportunity for us to counter the backlash against women's equality.

\* Barbara Byers is Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress

- reprinted from Straight Goods

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** advocacy <sup>[3]</sup>

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<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/gender>